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ABSTRACT

A study analyzed the attitudes of a random sample of completers of nontraditional and traditional vocational programs toward the school and career counseling that they received while enrolled in a vocational education program in West Virginia in 1980. The survey instrument, which was completed by 36 of the 100 nontraditional program completers originally contacted and by 42 of the 100 traditional completers asked to complete the survey, dealt with the students' reasons for enrolling in a vocational program, their satisfaction with the program, and the support that they received for their enrollment decision from influential individuals. In general, many students did not feel that they could turn to their vocational teachers for support. Many felt that their counselors were of little or no help to them. It appeared that the traditional completers received more help in securing educational or job placement and more support for their career choice than did the nontraditional respondents. When data were broken down by sex, 70 percent of the nontraditional male completers felt that their employer had received information about them from their teachers; however, only 29 percent of the nontraditional females felt the same way. (Six tables of data are appended to this report.) (MN)

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PERCEPTIONS OF NONTRADITIONAL AND TRADITIONAL VOCATIONAL COMPLETERS TOWARD CAREER GUIDANCE

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the perceptions of a random sample of nontraditional and traditional secondary vocational education completers toward their career guidance and career goals. These included enrollment factors, encouragement to enroll in courses, satisfaction with vocational program, support of influential individuals, job information, and helpfulness with career choice and educational or job placement. A questionnaire was mailed and a random sample of the nonrespondents was contacted by telephone. Descriptive and chi-square statistics were used for analyses. The findings suggested that school-related problems exist for secondary students entering career preparation programs, especially for the nontraditional students. Some of the problems identified were the nontraditional completers perceived more opposition and least support for their career choice, the respondents didn't think they could turn to their vocational teacher for support, and the counselors were of no help to many of the respondents.

PERCEPTIONS OF NONTRADITIONAL AND TRADITIONAL VOCATIONAL COMPLETERS TOWARD CAREER GUIDANCE

For many years educators and students have complained about the information guidance counselors have provided or not provided to secondary students. "For some counselors, dispersing discouragement rather than encouragement has been the order of the day. Many minority group members and women have been limited by inappropriate counseling and testing." (Schlossberg & Pietrofesa, 1973, p. 44). Parents and students have pointed out they were not getting the help they needed from counselors (Upton, 1982).

"The guidance counselor is a potentially powerful influence on the student's selection of a nontraditional program. Counselors can be viewed as 'gatekeepers' to the various vocational and nontraditional programs offered by the schools who assist the students in choosing programs which are suited to their interests and abilities, and inform them of the probable results of choosing unsuitable programs. Viewed from this perspective, the impact that counselors can have on nontraditional program choice -- and thus, presumably, entry into nontraditional occupations -- cannot be minimized." (Lewis & Kaltreider, 1976, p. 149). Counselors occupy a strategic position relative to encouraging or discouraging students who desire to enter a nontraditional career (Ott, Carmichael, Gallup, Lewis, Russ, & Veres, 1980).

As a prelude, much attention has been given by the news media and Congress toward eliminating sex stereotyping, providing equity and allowing people to enter careers which were considered to be nontraditional for a particular sex. Many high school vocational education programs have attracted only one sex. This includes such programs as construction and trades and industry, which have been traditionally male oriented, and business and office

and home economics, which have been traditionally female oriented. "Bias is evident whenever it is assumed that someone can or cannot take a certain course of action because of her or his age, social class, sex or race." (Schlossberg & Pietrofesa, 1973, p. 44).

With the passage by Congress of the 1976 Education Amendments to the 1963 Vocational Education Act, these "traditional" occupations have been the topic of concern. As a result, students can enroll in programs that are "nontraditional" -- or can they? Enrollments indicate that females are still enrolling in traditionally female programs and males are still enrolling in traditionally male programs (Schenck, 1977; PEER, 1979). The literature revealed several studies where researchers investigated means of encouraging students to enter nontraditional programs (Lerner, Bergstrom, & Champagne, 1976; Lawson, 1977). Other researchers have identified problems or barriers experienced by students and adults entering traditional, as well as nontraditional programs (Betz, Engle, & Mallinson, 1969; Cochran, 1974; Green, 1979; Kendall and Miller, 1983; Rieder, 1977; Thomas & Stewart, 1971; Upton, 1982; Vetter, Sechler, Lowry, & Canova, 1979; Weltz, 1977; Wilson, Weikel, & Rose, 1982).

PURPOSE

This study analyzed the perceptions of nontraditional and traditional vocational education completers toward their school preparation and career selection. Vocational completers were students who completed with employability skills, a one or two year vocational program regardless of their class status. For example, data processing is a one-year program. If a student completed this program during the junior year, the subject was classified as a program completer even though the student was not eligible for

secondary graduation. A nontraditional completer was a male who had completed a traditionally female program or vice versa.

The objectives of this study were to describe and compare the perceptions of traditional and nontraditional completers toward:

1. reasons for enrolling in their vocational education program.
2. satisfaction with their vocational education program.
3. support of vocational program choice by influential individuals.
4. assistance and helpfulness from school personnel.

RESEARCH METHOD

The population was the 1980 West Virginia vocational education program completers from the vocational programs which had both nontraditional and traditional enrollments. A nontraditional vocational education program was defined as one with 20% or less enrollment by one sex (Ott et al., 1980; Vetter, 1981). A program enrolling 20% or less female was identified as a nontraditional female program and 20% or less enrollment by males was identified as a nontraditional male program. Using this procedure, 53 nontraditional programs were identified.

From these 53 programs, two separate samples were drawn: (a) a random sample of 100 nontraditional completers (N=208, 48%); and for comparison (b) a random sample of 100 traditional completers from the same school and vocational program as the selected nontraditional completers (N=1336, 7%).

A questionnaire (Kendall, 1981) was designed for this study and reviewed by a panel of experts to establish content validity. The questionnaire was pretested with both males and females in a vocational program. The Cronbach Alpha technique determined the reliability coefficients for perceptions of school preparation and attitudes toward school for both the pretest sample (alpha = .49 and .48 respectively) and for the data sample (alpha = .65 and

.73 respectively). According to Nunnally (1967) the questionnaire was found to be reliable.

Ten months after their program completion, 100 nontraditional and 100 traditional vocational completers were mailed a letter from the Director of the Research Coordinating Unit explaining the study, their selection and that a questionnaire would follow. Efforts were made to locate the vocational completers whose questionnaire was returned as undelivered by the postal service. A follow-up questionnaire and an incentive were mailed to all nonrespondents. A month after the initial mailing, telephone calls were made to collect the data from a 10% sample of the traditional and nontraditional nonrespondents. Using chi-square analysis, no statistical difference was found between the nonrespondents and respondents and the data was collapsed. Response rates used in data analyses were: nontraditional sample = 36%, traditional sample = 42%. Chi-square statistics were used for the group comparisons and the comparison-wise error rate should be considered in interpreting the results.

RESULTS

Enrollment Factors. According to the respondents, counselors were not significantly effective in convincing students to enroll in a nontraditional vocational program. Only 27% of the traditional and six percent of the nontraditional respondents reported that their counselor convinced them to enroll in a vocational education program. When the data were analyzed by sex, none of the nontraditional females were convinced by their counselor to enroll in a vocational program. However, vocational teachers were influential in the decision by the respondents to enroll in a vocational program.

The large majority of the respondents selected their program because the "program sounded interesting," "wanted to try out this field," "wanted to

learn a skill to prepare for a job" and "thought they would like the work" (Table 1). There were ordinal differences in the responses between the traditional and nontraditional completers. Almost twice as many traditional completers wanted their vocational program for personal use as nontraditional completers.

Significantly one-third of the nontraditional and almost two-thirds of the traditional respondents thought their program would lead to a good job with a good income (Table 1). The nontraditional respondents most frequently chose their program because the "program sounded interesting" (81%), while the traditional respondents "wanted to learn a skill" (81%). When the data were broken down by sex, the most frequent response for each respondent group was:

- o Traditional female -- try out the field (95%)
- o Traditional male -- wanted to learn a skill (76%)
- o Nontraditional female -- program sounded interesting (97%)
- o Nontraditional male -- wanted to try out this field (67%)
  wanted to learn a skill (67).

Encouraged To Take Courses. In general the respondents thought it was a good idea for students to enroll in nontraditional courses. Over three-fourths of the nontraditional and traditional respondents indicated females should be encouraged to take nontraditional courses such as construction, maintenance trades, agriculture, drafting, or electronics (86% and 78% respectively). In comparison, not as many respondents were as agreeable, that males should be encouraged to take nontraditional courses such as personal services, cosmetology, secretarial work or home economics (nontraditional = 82%, traditional = 72%).

Vocational Program Satisfaction. The large marjority of the traditional and nontraditional respondents were satisfied with their vocational education program and would choose the same program again. However, more traditional respondents would choose the program again than nontraditional respondents.

Ninety percent of the respondents would recommend their vocational program to a friend and reported that they had good teachers (Table 2). Of all the respondents who indicated they liked their vocational education experience, a fewer number would choose the same program again (Table 2). All of the traditional females would recommend their vocational program to a friend compared to the traditional males (81%), nontraditional males (92%), and nontraditional females (88%).

Supportiveness of Vocational Choice by Influential Individuals. The large majority of the traditional and nontraditional respondents indicated that their vocational teachers were interested in their progress (90% and 89% respectively). Also, the vocational teachers were instrumental in the decision by the respondents to enroll in a vocational education program. However, the respondents revealed that once enrolled, the vocational teacher did not provide as much support as they wanted.

According to this study, the nontraditional completers perceived more opposition and least support for their career choice. The nontraditional female had the least support from mother, counselors and male friends; whereas, the nontraditional males had the least support from father, male friends, and female friends (Table 3). Over two-thirds of the parents supported the traditional choice while slightly more than half supported the nontraditional choice of their sons or daughters.

Counselor Assistance. Fifty-six percent of the nontraditional respondents and 60% of the traditional respondents indicated their counselor supported their vocational choice. However, when the data were broken down by sex, less than half (46%) of the nontraditional females revealed their counselor supported their choice (Table 3). The nontraditional females were

also the only respondent group that reported opposition from their counselor (Table 3).

Job Information. In helping the respondents locate jobs, slightly more than 40% of the respondents indicated their vocational teacher gave information about the respondents to their employers. When the data were broken down by sex, 70% of the nontraditional males thought their employer had received information from their teachers; whereas, significantly less of the nontraditional females (29%) agreed with this statement (Table 2).

Sixty-seven percent of the respondents revealed they were taught how to complete job application forms in their vocational program. A significant difference appeared when the data were broken down by sex. Ninety-two percent of the nontraditional males and 86% of the traditional females agreed in learning this skill; whereas, only 48% of the traditional males and 54% of the nontraditional females agreed. NOTE: The nontraditional males and traditional females were in the same program in the same school. The same is true for the traditional males and nontraditional females.

Perceived Helpfulness With Career Choice. According to the respondents, their vocational teachers, male parent and the respondents themselves were significantly of much help toward their career choice while enrolled in high school (Table 4). Slightly more than one-third of the respondents indicated the counselors were of "some" help. One-third of the traditional and 43% of the nontraditional respondents indicated their counselor was of "no help." Also, a large majority indicated the school placement service was of no help (Table 4).

When the data were broken down by sex, over half of the nontraditional females (54%) indicated counselors were of no help, as compared to 18% of the

nontraditional males (Table 5). In addition 25% of the nontraditional females and 9% of the nontraditional males indicated their counselor was of much help.

Assistance With Educational or Job Placement. In general, the traditional respondents received more help in securing educational or job placement than nontraditional respondents. Significantly more than twice as many traditional respondents than nontraditional revealed their vocational teacher was much help (45% and 20% respectively) (Table 6). However, almost half of the respondents indicated their vocational teachers and friends were of no help. Significantly more respondents indicated "myself" was of much help than of some or no help. Half of the parents were of much help for the traditional respondents while only one-fourth of the parents were of much help for the nontraditional respondents. Significantly more of the nontraditional (76%) than traditional (46%) respondents indicated their guidance counselors were of no help. The school placement services and employment agencies were also of no help to the respondents.

Respondent's Suggestions. The respondents were at liberty to give suggestions that would have helped them minimize or lessen their concerns while enrolled in the vocational program. Many of those suggestions were addressed to administrators, teachers, and employers. However, they had some helpful insights regarding their guidance counselor's responsibilities. These responses included that counselors should:

- be more involved with students in helping them choose their field.
- encourage the students to get more involved in vocational programs.
- say something to the students and try to encourage them to take a vocational class to get some kind of experience.
- ask and be more ready to help.
- work harder with students with application forms and particularly interviewing.

- keep reminding the students that you're on their side.
- make sure the students are told there is no job guarantee.
- be encouraging to the students.
- work together with teachers. It would be a great help to students.
- be more concerned about how the students are doing and be more helpful.
- try to realize everyone's needs and wants and each should try to help one another in helping to reach their goals.
- get more information about the subject before giving your opinion.
- set up an appointment with a vocational teacher or someone who knows the vocational field if they don't know much about it.

Other responses from students included: "It is not a good idea for counselors and teachers to encourage us, that they will have this big job waiting for them. This isn't the way it is. If students are told this, they may realize they aren't studying as hard. It isn't that easy. Students need to buckle down and be told that jobs aren't easy to find, then they will study harder (sic)." From this traditional female response, she wanted the teacher and counselor to be realistic, not idealistic.

Another concern expressed by several students was not being able to enroll in a vocational course. As one student indicated, "Students should not be classified as college prep and lock them into those courses. I had extra time to take vocational education auto mechanics but couldn't take it due to college prep classification. Printing classes and computer courses would have helped me (sic)." At the time of the survey this respondent was enrolled in a journalism department in a university.

"I think high school students should be encouraged to take vocational courses instead of wasting time going to college -- Here I am 18, have a good full time job, excellent benefits and a car -- while some of my friends will graduate from college in 4 years and end up with the same type of job (sic)."

Several respondents were very supportive of the school personnel. "Kids should be nice to teachers, have consideration for counselors, administrators and employers. They're only doing their job and trying to make a living (sic)." "The vocational program is the best for several reasons. Mine was helping me find a goal. I found it now, to go on further in my career (sic)."

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The study identified factors that nontraditional and traditional completers of vocational education programs perceived as barriers in obtaining their career goals. These included enrollment factors, encouragement to take courses, satisfaction with vocational program, support of influential individuals, job information, and helpfulness with career choice and educational or job placement. The findings identified potential problems experienced by secondary students in traditional and nontraditional vocational education programs. Even though the response rate was low, all vocational education programs were represented by the traditional and nontraditional respondents.

From the data, the nontraditional respondents were not motivated by as great a variety of factors for enrolling in the vocational program as the traditional completers. The respondents chose their program because it sounded interesting or they wanted to learn a skill. More career guidance is needed to inform students of the occupational value of these vocational programs and the options available to them.

In general the respondents thought it was a good idea for students to enroll in nontraditional courses. The large majority of respondents were satisfied with their vocational education program, would choose the same program again, and recommend their program to a friend.

The respondents indicated that their vocational teachers were influential in their decision to enroll in a vocational education program. However, they indicated that once enrolled, their teacher did not provide as much help as they wanted. Also the majority of respondents did not think they could turn to their vocational teacher for support.

Two-thirds of the respondents indicated they were taught how to complete job application forms in their vocational program. This is a golden opportunity for guidance counselors and vocational teachers to work together in presenting resume writing, completing job applications and interviewing techniques.

The nontraditional completers perceived more opposition and least support for their career choice. Slightly more than half of the counselors supported the vocational choice of the respondents. More parents supported the traditional choice of their sons or daughters than the nontraditional choice.

The vocational teachers were significantly helpful to the respondents regarding their career choice in high school. The counselors were of some help to approximately one-third of the respondents. However, one-third of the traditional and 43% of the nontraditional respondents indicated their counselor was of no help toward their career choice in high school. Significantly more than twice as many traditional than nontraditional respondents revealed their vocational teacher was of much help toward their educational or job placement.

These findings suggest that substantial school-related problems exist for secondary students entering career preparation programs, especially the nontraditional programs. These findings support prior research that guidance counselors are of little assistance to vocational students. Educators and counselors must carefully assess (a) students' attitudes toward nontraditional

enrollments, (b) support of influential others and (c) openness of the job market for these nontraditional students. Counselors and educators have the community employment contacts as well as basic knowledge of the vocational subject matter. Thus they should be instrumental in encouraging employers to hire the students who have completed traditional and nontraditional programs. In order to improve the perception of the students regarding the assistance they receive from their guidance counselors, counselors may need to explain to the students, on a regular basis, the services that are available to them.

As one respondent reported, he could not take any vocational courses due to his "college prep" student status. Unfortunately this condition exists in more school systems than is readily apparent. Administrators, educators, counselors and students need to be assertive in helping students receive the well-rounded education they need. Is education meeting the needs of students when they are forbidden to take courses because of school groupings or classifications?

Table 1

Factors Influencing Nontraditional and Traditional

Respondents' Selection of Vocational Education Program

Factors	Nontraditional %	Traditional %
Program sounded interesting	81	76
Wanted to try out this field	78	76
Thought I would like the work	75	68
Wanted to learn a skill	67	81
Jobs available in this field	50	71
Recommended by people	47	46
Good at this kind of work	47	66
Wanted it for personal use	39	63**
Good job with a good income	33	61*
Did not want to go to college	19	20
Could not afford college	14	12
No other interesting program open	14	15
Friends were taking program	14	15
Wanted to work in parent's business in this field	8	12
Counselor convinced me to take it	6	27*
Parents convinced me to take it	6	17
Wanted to leave my home school	3	5
Don't know	3	5

* $p<.05$, chi square.

** $p<.10$, chi square.

Table 2

Respondents' Attitudes Toward School And School Preparation

Statement	Agreement[a] NT %	T %	TF %	NTM %	TM %	NTF[b] %
1. I liked vocational education experience very much.	94	95	95	100	95	92
2. I would choose the same vocational program again.	70	81	86	58	76	75
3. I would recommend my vocational program to a friend.	89	91	100	92	81	88
4. Vocational education teachers were good instructors.	91	90	95	100	86	88
5. Vocational education teachers were interested in my progress.	89	90	100	83	81	92
6. Vocational education teachers gave information about me to my employer.	42	41	47	70	35	29**
7. I was taught to fill out job application forms in my vocational education program.	67	67	86	92	48	54*

* $p<.01$, chi square.

** $p<.10$, chi square.

[a]Sum of strongly agree and agree responses.

[b]NT = Nontraditional
T = Traditional
TF = Traditional Female
NTM = Nontraditional Male
TM = Traditional Male
NTF = Nontraditional Female

Table 3

Support And Opposition For Respondents' Vocational Choice

Influential Individual	NT %	T %	TF %	NTM %	TM %	NTF[a] %
SUPPORTED CHOICE						
Mother	64	78	79	67	76	63
Counselor	56	60*	58	75	62	46
Father	53	69	69	50	68	55
Female Friend	53	65	74	42	57	58
Male Friend	42	65*	58	42	71	42
OPPOSED CHOICE						
Mother	6	3	0	0	5	8
Counselor	8	0*	0	0	0	13
Father	9	0	0	0	0	14
Female Friend	11	3	5	8	0	13
Male Friend	3	5*	11	0	0	4

* $p<.10$, chi square.

[a] NT = Nontraditional
T = Traditional
TF = Traditional Female
NTM = Nontraditional Male
TM = Traditional Male
NTF = Nontraditional Female

Table 4

Helpfulness With Career Choice While Completers Were in High School

Influential Individuals	Much Help		Some Help		No Help	
	NT %	T %	NT %	T %	NT %	T[a] %
Myself	63	81	37	10	0	9**
Vocational Teacher	44	79	39	16	17	5*
Female Parent or Guardian	37	61	40	26	23	13
Male Parent or Guardian	33	64	46	22	21	14**
Male Friend	23	38	40	27	37	35
Female Friend	23	31	46	36	31	33
Nonvocational Teacher	23	32	49	33	28	35
Guidance Counselor	20	28	37	39	43	33
Former Vocational Stude t	18	24	38	24	44	52
Co-Op Employer	17	38	21	10	62	52
Co-Op Coordinator	10	20	32	40	58	40
School Placement Service	6	18	12	9	82	73
Public Employment Agency	3	6	6	15	91	79
Private Employment Agency	0	6	3	15	97	79***

* $p<.01$, chi square.

** $p<.05$, chi square.

*** $p<.10$, chi square.

[a]NT = Nontraditional
T = Traditional

Table 5

Helpfulness To Career Choice By Respondent Groups By Sex

While Completers Were In High School

Influential Individuals	TF %	NTM %	TM %	NTF[a] %
	MUCH HELP			
Guidance Counselor	33	9	24	25
	SOME HELP			
Guidance Counselor	40	73	38	21
	NO HELP			
Guidance Counselor	27	18	38	54

[a]TF = Traditional Female
NTM = Nontraditional Male
TM = Traditional Male
NTF = Nontraditional Female

Table 6

Sources Considered of Much Help, Some Help or No Help

In Securing Educational or Job Placement

Influential Individuals and Agencies	Much Help		Some Help		No Help	
	NT %	T %	NT %	T %	NT %	T[a] %
Myself	63	75	37	11	0	14**
Vocational Teacher	20	45	32	13	48	42***
Female Parent or Guardian	28	56	44	25	28	19**
Male Parent or Guardian	24	53	44	30	32	17***
Male Friend	4	29	32	16	64	55
Female Friend	23	27	27	21	50	52
Nonvocational Teacher	12	19	28	16	60	65
Guidance Counselor	12	27	12	27	76	46***
Former Vocational Student	8	14	21	21	71	65
Co-Op Employer	22	18	13	21	65	61
Co-Op Coordinator	9	13	17	20	74	67
School Placement Service	4	10	4	17	92	73
Public Employment Agency	4	4	21	10	75	86
Private Employment Agency	4	3	0	14	76	83

* $p<.01$, chi square.

** $p<.05$, chi square.

*** $p<.10$, chi square.

[a]NT = Nontraditional
T = Traditional

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